

Tips for conducting Pause and Learn sessions

Identify a significant event – it's easier if the PaL session can focus on one particular event that has occurred or is about to occur.

Make sessions brief – in most cases, between 1 and 2 hours. You may want an outside facilitator to help get them started (and to end).

Hold sessions regularly – learning happens throughout the life of a project—make PaLs a habit not an afterthought when your project is over.

No good or bad consequences – team members will be honest if what they say in a PaL session has no individual consequences. A PaL is a non-attribution environment.

Do not create reports – there are no formal reports from a PaL session. It is helpful to take notes for reference, but notes should not directly quote participants and are primarily intended for the team.

Make sessions local – find a room, close the door, and hold the session soon after an event, review etc. Don't wait until a mishap occurs.

What some say about holding a PaL...

“Having that PaL session greatly improved our flight preparation process.”
– Mike Rudolphi, MSFC Director of Engineering

“We would have a [PaL] session after an activity...and not just what we did wrong that needs improvement, but what we did right to make sure that we can repeat.” – Marty Davis, GSFC, GOES/POES Satellite Program Manager

“Having a PaL helps projects identify new risks at the same time that it works to mitigate those risks.” – Garry Lyles, HQ, ESMD Chief Engineer

“ESMD has conducted numerous workshops to familiarize personnel with the PaL process...PaLs are currently in use at all levels of the Directorate...” -- David Lengyel, ESMD Risk Management

“Doing that one PaL session probably saved my project.” – Doug McLennan, GSFC Project Manager

Think your team could use a PaL? Questions or comments?

Office of the Chief Knowledge Officer
Goddard Space Flight Center
Dr. Edward Rogers
(301)286-4467
Edward.W.Rogers@nasa.gov

Introducing...

NASA's Pause and Learn Process

The PaL is a proven way to facilitate team learning during missions. It is sensible, valuable and simple to implement.

Learn how inside...

Office of the
Chief Knowledge Officer
Goddard Space Flight Center

Dr. Edward Rogers
Edward.W.Rogers@nasa.gov
(301)286-4467

What is a Pause and Learn session?

A Pause and Learn (PaL) session is a method for reflecting and transferring individual lessons from a specific project event among fellow team members.

Team members meet behind closed doors, take off their official “hats” for a brief period, and look back on a recent event to gain a more thorough understanding of what has happened, and why.

Many organizations have successfully adopted this type of organizational learning (sometimes referred to as action-learning), including: Shell Oil, IBM, Fidelity Investments, US Army, and Harley Davidson.

NASA’s version is called the Pause and Learn session.

Key Benefits:

- ❖ Identify and spread local best practices
- ❖ Identify and eliminate wasted effort
- ❖ On-the-spot individual and team learning
- ❖ Build a team approach to problem solving
- ❖ Build team morale
- ❖ Increase likelihood of project success



Post-mortem vs. PaL session *

Post-mortem	PaL session
Conducted at the end of project	Conducted throughout project
Used after a major mishap or accident	Used after any event-team success or challenge
Large scope – all past events	Small scope – one recent event
Lengthy process and large time commitment	Simple process and very small time commitment
Lengthy report (few read it)	No reports – just insights and ideas useful immediately
Benefits mainly others who read the report	Benefits team members who participate

“The PaL process is not an after-action report, is not a post mortem study, and is not an investigation. It is simply a time to reflect and learn from what we have experienced.”

* = Adapted from Signet Consulting’s “From Post-Mortem to Living Practice. An in-depth study of the evolution of the After Action Review.”

How is a Pause and Learn session conducted?

Before a PaL session begins, a designated facilitator makes the ground rules clear:

- **Be discreet.** A PaL session is a closed-door discussion among team members. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, what gets said in the room stays in the room.
- **Be honest.** When the activity being discussed directly involves you, call it as you see it
- **Be tolerant.** Others’ opinions and perspectives are equally important, regardless of rank or experience.
- **Be a team.** When looking at an individual’s actions, view it from the perspective of team responsibility for ensuring excellence.

Five Questions

A PaL session can explore many issues, but the team should try to focus on these five questions:

- What did we intend to do?
- What worked well, and why?
- What didn’t work well --why?
- What did we learn from this?
- What should we change?